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AN

ANSWER

TO THE

QUESTION,

OF

WHY ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN?

By JOHN CLARKE, D. D.
OF BOSTON, NEW ENGLAND.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.
1. PETER iii. 15.

THE SIXTH EDITION.

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PREFACE

To this Edition.

The following tract was originally published at BOSTON in AMERICA, and was written by the minister of the first church in that town. It was re-published in London, by an excellent friend to Christianity, whose well written preface is preserved in the subsequent editions. Few tracts have appeared in which the principal arguments for the truth of christianity have been displayed with greater clearness, conciseness, and energy; and the work must be read with pleasure by every sincere christian. Five editions have already been well received by the public; and the two editions now offered, (one in a larger form than the preceding) it is not doubted will meet with equal acceptance. One or two notes are now added by way of illustration of some of the arguments of the Author.

It has not unfrequently been matter of regret, that the *arguments* of christians have not always been enforced by their *lives*; but that on the contrary, the one have been contradictory to the other. This, it is to be feared, has done much injury, greater injury perhaps, to the cause of christianity, than all the arguments of its enemies. The true friends of christianity will therefore hear with pleasure, that the *life* of the author of the following tract afforded an admirable comment on his *sentiments*. A friend of the Author's the Rev. *Mr. Freeman* of *Boston*, *New England*, in a letter dated *Feb.* 2. 1799, writes concerning him as follows:

——"I forget whether or not I informed you in my last of the death of my valuable friend, Dr. Clarke. I passed a Saturday afternoon with him in great chearfulness, when he appeared in perfect health. The following day, whilst he was preaching, he was suddenly seized with an apoplexy, and died before the next morning. A friendship commenced with him

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almost in infancy, had enabled me to know him intimately. He was a person of great industry, learning, delicacy of taste, and purity of character. His talents for conversation rendered him the delight of every company, and his obliging temper and goodness of heart in a peculiar manner endeared him to all his friends. As a preacher, he was affectionate and persuasive; and to him might be applied those words of Moses, "that his speech distilled as the dew." By his death, this town, rational Christianity, and the cause of piety and virtue, have suffered a loss which will not soon be repaired. His correct sentiments of the gospel appear in the little work which you have introduced into notice in England. All his preaching and conversation were of the same tenor. There was a time, when, by the open and bold declaration of his sentiments, he had rendered himself very unpopular: but his good sense, candour, and exemplary life, gradually overcame all opposition; and he lived long enough to see himself the favourito of all parties, and even of those who differed the most from him in opinion."

The editor cannot but urge a serious attention to the subject of the following tract on all who profess to be FREE INQUIRERS AFTER TRUTH; and more especially on the rising generation, who may be in danger from the Infidelity and Sceptiscim of the day. If Christianity be a revelation from heaven, it must be of the last importance. If it reveals a plan of redemption for a fallen world, the rejection of it cannot be a matter of indifference. If it comes from GOD tho fountain of truth, it must contain evidence sufficient to convince every honest inquirer of its divinity. The profane, the careless, the infidel may trifle; but let them seriously reflect, that if they reject this last and best gift of God to mankind, it is at the peril of their souls! They may rest assured, that to every one who has an opportunity of hearing and reading this revelation, the grand object of it, JESUS CHRIST, will most assuredly prove a rock, either to build or to split upon!

Cambridge, Dec. 11th 1803. B. F.

ADVERTISEMENT

To the Second Edition.

READER,

IF you are a believer in the Christianity, in which all Christians agree, however divided on other points, this short American defence of it, presents you with a series of arguments in its behalf, which will satisfy you that you have made a wise choice. If, on the other hand, you reject, or are indifferent about it, an attentive perusal may cause some hesitation, whether you have sufficiently weighed a matter of such importance. Not that you will meet with any thing that has not been observed before by our best writers, particularly some now living. But its merit consists, in the collection and arrangement of the materials for forming a just judgment, in compressing them into so small a compass, and proposing them in a manner so lively and familiar, as to invite to more serious reflection than might have been before bestowed upon them.

Should there be noted any flaw or mistake, in any single circumstance, or part of the argument, this will not invalidate the rest. The force of the demonstration of the truth of the gospel here exhibited, lies in the amount and general consistency of the whole of the evidence produced for it. And how, fairly and candidly, to dispose of and to account for that mass of evidence, as here briefly sketched out, without lending credit to it, is not easy to see: it certainly never yet has been done.

There is something very satisfactory, and not common, in what the writer advances concerning the miracles of Christ; and in his refuting and exposing the inconsistency of those whom one often hears declaring, that "they are Christians, all but the miracles;" who,

not being able to refuse their testimony to the superior moral character of the Founder of our religion, and to the lessons of the purest virtue delivered by him, "profess," as our author speaks, "to believe the history of our Lord's discourses, but reject that of his miracles."

It is indeed this impregnable fort of the gospel, the miraculous interposition of the Divine Being in its favour, which is the mark at which modern unbelievers aim, and bend all their forces to undermine it: but in vain.

Their objections to the credibility of such divine interpositions, from the fondness of mankind, for the marvellous, and their liableness to be imposed on; their arguing, with little modesty, against the all-wise and benevolent Creator, making use of such a precarious and doubtful proof of his will and designs; and maintaining that the laws of nature, which are his laws, being convincing, clear, and immutable, are sufficient indications of his will, and make all other revelation of it unnecessary: these and many similar objections, too often proceeding from an extreme scepticism, or the imaginations of a presumptuous philosophy, which tends to exclude the Deity from the world he has made, all vanish away before the plain common sense and reason of men; which, although frequently deceived, has led them to discern, and give credit to extraordinary and miraculous facts, as to the most ordinary ones in their daily transactions; when properly attested, when the evidence for them has been sufficient, and not loaded with any natural impossibilities and contradictions.*But let me not detain you any longer from the pleasure and profit of inspecting this valuable little tract yourself.

T. L.

* Dr. Prieſtley has ſhewn the weakneſs and fallacy of various objections to this great proof of Divine Revelation, in his Anſwer to Mr. Paine's Age of Reaſon, which is a full confutation of that popular writer's attack upon Chriſtianity, ſo far as it goes. It is a pleaſure to find that there is already a demand here for a ſecond impreſſion of this work, which has paſſed through ſeveral editions in America.

AN ANSWER

TO THE

QUESTION,

WHY ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN?

NOT because I was born in a Christian country, and educated in Christian principles; not because I find the illustrious BACON, BOYLE, LOCKE, CLARKE, and NEWTON, among the professors and defenders of Christianity; nor merely because the system itself is so admirably calculated to mend and exalt human nature; but because the evidence accompanying the gospel has convinced me of its truth. The secondary causes, assigned by unbelievers, do not, in my judgment, account for the rise, progress, and early triumphs of the Christian religion. Upon the principles of scepticism, I perceive an effect without an adequate cause. I therefore stand acquitted to my own reason, though I continue to believe and profess the religion of Jesus Christ. Arguing from effects to causes, I think, I have philosophy on my side: and reduced to a choice of difficulties, I encounter not so many, in admitting the miracles ascribed to the Saviour, as in the arbitrary suppositions and conjectures of his enemies.

That there once existed such a person as JesusChrist; that he appeared in Judea in the reign of Tiberius; that he taught a system of morals superior to any inculcated in the Jewish schools; that he was crucified at Jerusalem; and that Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor, by whose sentence he was condemned and executed, are facts which no one can reasonably call in question. The most inveterate deists admit them without difficulty. And, indeed, to dispute these facts would be giving the lie to all history. As well might we deny the existence of Cicero, as that of a person by the name of Jesus Christ: and with equal propriety might we call in question the orations of the former, as the discourses of the latter. We are morally certain that the one entertained the Romans with his eloquence; and that the other enlightened the Jews with his wisdom. But it is unnecessary to labour these points, because they are generally conceded. They, who affect to despise the Evangelists and Apostles, profess to reverence Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny: and these eminent Romans bear testimony to several particulars, which relate to the person of Jesus Christ, his influence as the founder of a sect, and his crucifixion. From a deference to human authority, all therefore, acknowledge, that the Christian religion derived its name from Jesus Christ. And many among the Deists are so just to its merits, as to admit, that he taught better than Confucius; and practised better than Socrates or Plato.

But, I confess, my creed embraces many more articles. I believe, that Jesus Christ, was not only a teacher of virtue, but that he had a special commission to teach. I believe, that his doctrines are not the work of human reason, but divine communications to mankind. I believe that he was authorized by God to pro-

claim forgiveness to the penitent; and to reveal a state of immortal glory and blessedness to those who fear God, and work righteousness. I believe, in short, the whole evangelic history, and of consequence, the divine original of Christianity, and the sacred authority of the gospel. Others may reject these things as the fictions of human art or policy; but I assent to them, from a full conviction of their truth. The grounds of this conviction, I shall assign in the course of this work: and I shall undertake to show, why the objections of infidelity, though they have often shocked my feelings, have never yet shaken my faith.

To come then to the question: WHY ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN? I answer; because the Christian religion carries with it internal marks of its truth; because not only without the aid, but in opposition to the civil authority, in opposition to the wit, the argument, and violence of its enemies, it made its way, and gained an establishment in the world: because it exhibits the accomplishment of some prophecies, and presents others which have been since fulfilled; and because its author displayed an example, and performed works, which bespeak, not merely a superior, but a divine character. Upon these several facts, I ground my belief as a Christian; and, till the evidence on which they rest, can be invalidated by counter evidence, I must retain my principles, and my profession.

SECTION I.

The Internal Evidence of Christianity.

First: I am a Christian, because the intrinsic excellency of Christianity points it out as a system worthy of my belief; because the laws which it prescribes, the spirit which it breathes, and the discoveries which it makes, are so admirably suited to the constitution and circumstances of man, that I cannot reject it. The preceptive part of Christianity has been very generally approved. And how is it possible, that any one should seriously object to laws, which tend to correct the errors, and reform the vices of human nature, and to exalt the character of man to the highest stage of moral perfection? If Christianity prescribed the austerities of the monk, the solitude of the hermit, or the wanderings of the pilgrim; if it even gave countenance to such extravagancies, or allowed them the lowest degree of merit, I should esteem it a formidable objection to the system: but nothing of this description can be found in the writings of the Evangelists or Apostles. Those writings pour contempt upon all superstitious practices, and lead us to ascribe no value to any works, but those of true piety and virtue. They teach us to worship God in spirit and in truth; to love him supremely; to be grateful for his favours, and resigned to his dispensations; to trust in his mercy, and rejoice in his government. They teach us to dismiss all anxious cares and apprehensions; and having employed the means, which infinite wisdom has appointed, to leave the event *with* infinite goodness. They teach us to love our neigh-

bour as ourselves ; to forgive him when he has injured us; to bear with his infirmities,and to excuse his follies ; to weep with him in his distresses ; when he is in want, to afford him our assistanee ; and to do to him as we should think it fit and reasonable that he should do to us. They teaeh us to love even our enemies, so far at least as to abstain from revenge, and to render them offices of kindness when their circumstances eall for commiseration. They teach us to govern our appetites and passions, to be chaste, humble, temperate, pure, and as much as possible to be like ourFather in heaven, whose eharaeter is an assemblage of every natural and moral perfection. They teaeh children to reverence and obey their parents ; and parents to love, instruct, and provide for their ehildren. They teach the husband eonjugal fidelity and affection ; and the wife the peculiar duties of her station, and the amiable virtues whieh adorn the sex, and bless the marriage union. They teaeh masters lenity, and servants faithfulness. They teach rulers to exercise their authority for the public good ; and persons in private life, not to withhold honour and submission from those, under whose wise and just administration, they lead quiet and peaceable lives. In a word, the affluent and the poor, the prosperous and the afflicted, the aged and the young, may all find their duty in the saered books : and the duties, there enjoined, are such as the enlightened reason of every man must approve.

These sublime lessons of morality are found in various parts of the New Testament. They enrich the divine sermon on the mount : and they are contained in the excellent parables delivered by Jesus Christ.

I also find them in the discourses of the Apostles, and in their pastoral letters. I may say, wherever I open the Christian volume, I find some direction, which, if properly observed, would render me a good neighbour, a good member of society, a good friend, and a good man. And is it possible for me to doubt the divine original of a system, which furnishes such rules, and contemplates so glorious an object?

If the prohibitions of Jesus Christ were universally regarded, and his laws obeyed, what blessings would pour in on society? There would be no wars among the nations of the earth. There would be no oppression. There would be neither tyrants nor slaves. Every ruler would be just; every citizen would be honest; every parent would be faithful to his charge; every child would be dutiful; the purest affection would recommend domestic life; and neighbours would be mutual blessings. Under the dominion of Christianity, envy, pride, and jealousy would give way to the most enlarged benevolence; human nature would recover its dignity, and every man would reap the present reward of his own virtues.

From these facts, others may draw their own conclusions: my inference is, that Christianity is true. I do not believe, that such a system of morals can be the work of human wisdom. That these laws originated with God; and that Jesus Christ was commissioned to promulgate them, appears to me a much more rational supposition. The more I inspect them, the less am I inclined to compliment human ingenuity with so glorious a production. If then, I continue to believe, in this age of refinement, and free enquiry, it is because I am unable to resist the evidence arising from the trans-

cendent excellency of the Christian precepts. I think it infinitely more probable, that they should be a communication from God, than that philosophy should justly claim the honour of the invention.

The doctrines of the Christian religion furnish an additional argument in its favour. They are such as appear worthy of God, and answerable to the natural expectations of men. The perfections of the Deity, his agency in the creation and government of the world, the conditions of his approbation, the consequences, and a future state of existence, are points respecting which every reasonably being would wish for information: and it is a fact, that the New Testament throws divine light on all these articles. It informs us, that there is one God; that he is infinitely holy, wise, benevolent, and just; that he is self-existent and independent; that his power is irresistable, and his presence universal; that he made and upholds all worlds; that he created the human species, and every inferior being; that he is, moreover, their preserver and benefactor; that he exercises a moral government over man; that he requires obedience to his laws, and consequently, resents their infraction; that forgiveness is possible, and repentance and reformation the conditions; that death is not utter destruction; that all who die will live again; that all who are raised, will be judged; and that there is a future state, in which virtue will shine with unfading lustre, and receive an everlasting reward. These are not useless speculations, but doctrines of infinite moment. They interest as well the heart, as the understanding; and their influence extends both to our actions, and our enjoyments.

It would be easy to produce the various passages, in which these points are maintained: but it is unnecessary; as every one will allow them to be the doctrines of Christianity. Whether the system be true or not, it certainly contains these articles. I would now put the question to every sober Theist, whether I must renounce either my understanding, or my creed? Is there any thing incredible in this representation of God and man; of the demands of the one, and the destination of the other? Must I offer an affront to my reason, if I believe in one God exercising the authority, and possessed of all the glorious attributes ascribed to him in the Christian writings? Does my understanding revolt at the evangelic account of his providence and moral government? That I should make it my study to obey him? when guilty of disobedience, that I should repent and reform? and that, as I behave, so I may expect to be treated? Is there any thing irrational in these doctrines? We read of a mediator, and a rich variety of blessings dispensed through him; and is not this agreeable to the established constitution of things in the world?—Do not temporal mercies often flow to us through the mediation of others? And may not many instances be produced, in which the political redemption of a nation has been accomplished by the labours, or purchased by the blood of some virtuous patriot? Is common sense insulted by the doctrine of a resurrection? This has been asserted; but with what reason, I never could conceive. When I examine the power and wisdom of God, they do not appear incompetent to such an effect. When I consider the divine goodness, I see nothing in the resurrection of man irreconcileable with that perfection; and when I reflect that God formed the human body, and inspired the breath of life, I can easily believe that he is able to

raise us up at the last day. Before I can rejeet the resurreetion of mankind, it must, therefore, be demonstrated, that the terms imply a eontradietion.

As to a future state of retribution, I would ask, what presumption there is against it? We find, that we have already experienced great ehanges. Since our first introduetion to this world, our aetive and intelleetual powers have gained strength, as we have advaneed towards maturity: and why may we not hereafter possess them in higher perfection? Why may we not move, not merely in a new, but in a nobler sphere? And as a moral government is evidently begun in this state, why may it not be eompleted in another? In these expectations I think we are supported by the analogy of nature. As we have already existed in different states, new seenes may be in reserve for us; and new capacities of action, enjoyment, or suffering, may await us beyond the grave.

Combining the doetrines and preeepts of Christianity, I am led then to infer from them the truth of the system. Because the former are so important, and the latter so beneficial; beeause the doetrines of Christ tend to make us so wise, and his laws so good, I am, in a manner, eompelled to receive them as divine. Sueh is their supreme excellenee, that I must aseend to heaven for an adequate cause. I assent, therefore, most unfeignedly to those words of our Saviour; "My doctrine "is not mine, but his who sent me." And I do assert, were there no other evidence that our religion is from God, it would be more reasonable to admit its claims to a divine original than to reject them.

SECTION II.

Evidence arising from the early Triumphs of Christianity.

But my faith as a Christian does not rest on this single foundation. I have other reasons for believing the gospel. The early triumphs of Christianity furnish a *second,* and in my view, a most weighty argument in support of my religion: and my conviction of its truth gains strength every time I examine its introduction, progress and establishment in the world. Recurring to the period of its infancy, I find, that it made its way not only without the aid, but in opposition to the civil authority. I observe, that it rose superior to the wit, the argument, and the violence of its enemies. I perceive that it baffled the arts of the Jewish priests and rulers, and supported itself against the rage of the multitude. When Heathens became its enemies and persecutors, I find their opposition as ineffectual as that of the Jews. Though it was the contempt and derision of the more leading characters in society, yet I take notice, that it gained a wonderful ascendency over the human mind; and at length became the religion of the Roman world. These are facts: and how am I to account for them, if Christianity be a mere fable?

I can easily believe, that an imposture may succeed, if it have the public prejudices, the learning, wealth, and influence of the country, or the sword of the magistrate on its side; I never wondered that the attempts of Mahomet to establish his religion were crowned with success. When I perse the Koran, and examine the materials of which it is composed; when I observe how much the work is indebted to the Jewish and

Christian revelations; when I survey the particular part, which Mahomet, or his agents supplied; when I see, with how much art the whole is accommodated to the opinions and habits of Jews, Christians, and Pagans; when I consider what indulgencies it grants, and what future scenes it unfolds; when I advert to the peculiar circumstances of the times, when its author formed the vast design of assuming the royal and prophetic character; and more than all, when I contemplate the reformer at the head of a conquering army, the Koran in one hand, and in the other a sword, I cannot be surprised at the civil and religious revolution which has immortalized his name. With his advantages, how could he fail of success? Every thing favoured the enterprise. The nations beheld a military apostle: and they, who were unconvinced by his arguments, trembled at his sword.

But had Jesus Christ recourse to such measures in order to establish *his* religion? Was he a general, or his apostles soldiers? In proof of his divine mission, did he affront the reason of mankind, by appealing to the sword? Did the learning of the age come to his assistance? Did genius and eloquence plead his cause? Were the principles of his religion such as would easily captivate persons of figure and fashion? Would wealth be partial to them? It is granted that the laws of Christianity are perfectly accommodated to the reasonable and moral nature of man; but, did the habits of the age, in which they were promulgated, predispose the public mind to receive those laws? and, were the doctrines of the gospel consonant to prevailing and popular opinions? There is not a man who has

examined the life, the actions, and the religion of Jesus Christ, and who is conversant with the history of that time, who will answer one of these queries in the affirmative.

In the whole compass of history, no fact is better established than the pacific character of our great master, and the inoffensive measures by which he prosecuted his cause. He proclaimed the truths, and inculcated the duties of his religion; but he used no violence to make men believe the one, or practise the other. He addressed himself to the reason of mankind; and then left them to make up their own judgment. At length he suffered; and his cause dévolved upon certain persons who had all, excepting Paul, attended upon his ministry, and been witnesses of his actions. These persons, called apostles, went forth into the world; and taught the same truths which they had learned from their master, and which he had sealed with his blood. In imitation of their great pattern, they likewise applied, not to the passions, but to the reason of the age. With the Jews they argued on their own principles; and, for the conviction of Gentiles, they appealed to facts. Not one of their enemies ever pretended, that more formidable weapons were employed by the apostles in the Christian cause. How then shall we account for their success? What induced several thousands of the Jewish nation to embrace Christianity? And why did such multitudes of the Gentile world forsake their superstitions, and receive the religion of the gospel?*

* The following extract from Bishop Sherlock's Sermons, (Vol. I. Dis. IX.) is allowed by some of our best critics, (Bishop Lowth, and Dr. Blair) to be one of the finest examples of *personification* in the English lan-

Was Christianity a popular system? None could be less so. Did it open the way to a seat in the Sanhedrim, to the honours of the priesthood, or to an office under the Roman government? I never heard the insinuation. Was it an introduction to wealth or power? It was the very reverse. Did it flatter any of the ruling passions of the human heart, or permit their gratification? Every one, who has examined it, knows the contrary. If then, as the terms are generally understood, it was neither honourable, profitable, nor popular; if it was the derision of philosophy, and the contempt of learning; if the wit of the age was exerted against it; if the priesthood hated, and the magistrate

guage. The comparison between our Saviour, and Mahomet, is equally juſt and beautiful.

"Go to your natural Religion; lay before her Mahomet, and his diſciples, arrayed in armour and blood, riding in triumph over the ſpoils of thouſands who fell by his victorious ſword. Shew her the cities which he ſet in flames, the countries which he ravaged and deſtroyed, and the miſerable diſtreſs of all the inhabitants of the earth. When ſhe has viewed him in this ſcene, carry her into his retirement; ſhew her the prophet's chamber; his concubines and his wives; and let her hear him allege revelation, and a divine commiſſion, to juſtify his adultery and luſt. When ſhe is tired with this proſpect, then ſhew her the bleſſed Jeſus, humble and meek, doing good to all the ſons of men. Let her ſee him in his moſt retired privacies; let her follow him to the mount, and hear his devotions and ſupplications to God. Carry her to his table, to view his poor fare; and hear his heavenly diſcourſe. Let her attend him to the tribunal, and conſider the patience with which he endured the ſcoffs and reproaches of his enemies. Lead her to his croſs; let her view him in the agony of death, and hear his laſt prayer for his perſecutors; *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!*—When Natural Religion has thus viewed both, aſk her, which is the Prophet of God? But her anſwer we have already had, when ſhe ſaw part of this ſcene, through the eyes of the Centurion, who attended at the croſs. By him ſhe ſpoke, and ſaid, *Truly, this Man was the Son of God!*"

persecuted it, to what cause am I to ascribe the prevalence of Christianity? Under all these disadvantages, what enabled it to keep its ground? Upon one principle only can I account for this fact to my own satisfaction, and that is, the truth of the system, and the patronage of heaven. I can believe, that truth may triumph over the most formidable opposition; and that God is able to defend his own cause.

For every phenomenon in nature there must be a sufficient reason. This is a doctrine of philosophy; and not only so, but a dictate of common sense. Taking this principle for granted, I therefore endeavour to account for the existence of Christianity. I find that the religion of Jesus is not coeval with many events preserved in history. By means of various records, which have escaped the ravages of time, I perceive, that less than eighteen centuries will carry me back to the age, in which this religion was first proposed to the world. By the confession of its enemies, it derived no support from the family, connexions, outward circumstances, or fate of its author. So far from it, all these things operated against it. Jesus Christ, though a very excellent, was in the estimation of the world a very obscure person. His family, though once exalted, had fallen into decay: and his fate was as infamous as it was unmerited. His followers, likewise, and those with whom he left his cause, were generally as obscure as their master. They had not wealth, to give them importance. They were not men in power. Nor were their natural abilities, or literary attainments, so great as to give them a decided superiority over their enmies. It is certain, therefore, that Christianity did not owe its success to any thing dazzling in the personal accomplishments or circumstances of its first preachers.

Where, then, shall I look for the cause? The religion of Christ did prevail; though to persons of figure and influenee, its author was an objeet of eontempt; and though his fate was that of the vilest malefaetor. It did make its way; though its ministers were the farthest possible from that description of men who take the lead in soeiety; whose opinions it is the pride of others to adopt; and whose example it is their ambition to follow. It did sueeeed; though it bore an uniform testimony against all the impiety and immorality practised in the world. Without flattering one disorderly passion of the human heart, without aceommodating itself to one eorrupt habit, it triumphed over the prejudiees of multitudes: and whilst its profession was attended with every temporal diseouragement, not only the provinees, but the very eity of Rome, abounded with Christians! I ask the question onee more, if Christianity be a fable, how am I to aecount for this revolution?

I well know the solution, which modern ingennity has proposed. Gibbon's seeondary eauses I have repeatedly examined; I would hope with impartiality: I certainly have done it with attention. But they never gave me satisfaetion; and for a reason, which the great Sir Isaae Newton shall assign. He says that a cause must be known to exist; and that it must be adequate to an effeet, before it ean be admitted into sound philosophy; and before such effect ean with propriety be referred to it. But the causes assigned by those who rejeet the Christian religion, appear to want both these conditions. We have no proof that many of them ever existed; and, united, they seem utterly inadequate to explain the various appearances, and aecount for the phenomena to which they have been applied. I am

therefore a Christian, because the rapid progress of Christianity, under all these disadvantages, will not suffer me to reject it as a fable.

SECTION III.

Evidence arising from the completion of prophecy.

But though conclusive, yet these are not the only arguments which give authority to the gospel. The completion of prophecy furnishes a *Third* reason for that reverence I feel for Christianity; and for my assent to it as a divine religion. In perusing the Jewish and Christian writings, I find several predictions. Some of these preceded the Saviour; and others were uttered by him. Some were accomplished in him; and others in events which took place after his appearing. Examples of each I shall first exhibit; and then shew why they determine me to be a Christian.

It was predicted, that the Messiah should come "before the sceptre departed from Judah." And does not history confirm this prediction? Did not Jesus Christ appear, and suffer, before the Jewish government was subverted by the Romans? It was predicted, that "he "should come whilst the second temple was standing;" and that the house should derive glory from the occasional visits of so great a character. And was not this prophecy fulfilled? It was predicted, that he should come "in four hundred and ninety years" from the time in which the city of the Jews should recover from

the disgrace, under which it had lain during the captivity: that he should "be cut off;" and that "Jerusalem and the temple should be afterwards made desolate." And did not these things happen in the order and at the period here described? It was predicted, that, in the age of the Messiah, many astonishing works should be performed. And were not such works performed by Jesus Christ? At least, is it not an article in his history, that through his benevolent interposition, and in consequence of his supernatural powers, the blind received their sight, the lame walked, the deaf heard, the dumb spake, the sick recovered, and the dead revived? Finally: it was predicted, "that he should enter "the holy city in triumph;" that his enemies should there conspire against him; that "he should be sold "for thirty pieces of silver;" that he "should be scourged," and treated with every species of contempt; that his persecutors should "spit upon him;" that they should "pierce his hands and feet;" that the spectators of his crucifixion should mock him; that "the soldiers "should draw lots for his garment;" that he should be "numbered with the transgressers;" that "gall and vinegar" should be presented to him when in his last agonies; and that he should "make his grave with the "rich." And, in the history of Christ, have we not the completion of these prophecies? Comparing the predictions and the events, can we deny that the latter are a perfect counterpart to the former?

But the person whose fate was so particularly foretold, was, as we are informed by some of his first followers, whose testimony is confirmed by their sufferings in his cause, and by their patience under them, was himself a prophet. On various occasions, he declared to his followers, that he should suffer a violent death.

He predicted, that his own countrymen would condemn him; and the Gentiles execute the sentence. He foretold the cowardice of Peter, the treachery of Judas, the terror and flight of all his disciples, when he should be arrested; his resurrection from the grave, the effusion of the Holy Spirit, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, with all the horrors attending it, the dispersion of the Jews, the persecution of his followers, and the success of the gospel, notwithstanding the opposition which would be made by its enemies.

And, according to the records of that age, did not all these things come to pass? Have we not the highest evidence which history can afford, that Jesus Christ both suffered and triumphed in the manner which he had before described? Were not his disciples hated of all men? Were not the most wanton cruelties exercised upon them? And did not the time come, when their extermination from the earth was contemplated as a sacrifice, which the honour of God, the interests of truth, and the good of society required? Was not Jerusalem destroyed by the Romans? And as to the temple, did the resentment of the conquering army leave one stone of that magnificent building on another? Before their reduction, were not the sufferings of the Jews such as no other people had ever experienced? And after that event, were they not dispersed among all nations? Does not their dispersion still continue? And are they not, at this very moment, a standing proof of his veracity who predicted their ruin? When I compare the denunciation of Jesus Christ with the fate of the Jews, I am unable to account for their conformity, if I reject his divine inspiration. The history of Josephus, who beheld the ruin of his country, comes in aid of the Evangelists. And I feel the same confidence, that

Christ foretold, as that the historian related, this terrible event.

After a cool and impartial examination of these facts, can it be strange that I should profess myself a Christian? How can I resist the evidence arising from the completion of prophecy? I find many predictions accomplished in Jesus Christ; and many which were uttered by him, I find incontestibly verified by succeeding events. Will it satisfy my reason to insinuate that this may be the work of chance? Will it be sufficient to say, that the author of our religion, and certain persons who assumed the name of prophets, happened to guess right? To those who have any acquaintance with the doctrine of chances, this insinuation will appear both impertinent and absurd. That there could not have been such a series of fortunate guesses, is a point capable of arithmetical demonstration.

The man, who can persuade himself to admit this supposition, must with a very ill grace object to the miracles, wonders, and signs, ascribed to Jesus Christ: and of all persons, he ought to be the last to charge others with credulity. As to myself, I cannot believe that, some hundreds of years before the Saviour appeared, the peculiar, circumstances of his life and death were guessed by some imposing diviner. I cannot be reconciled to the supposition, that one by mere accident, guessed that he would enter Jerusalem, riding on an ass, and be there sold for thirty pieces of silver; another, that his enemies would pierce his hands and his feet, would mock his agonies, and cast lots for his garment; a third, that he would be numbered with trans-

greſſors, and be laid in the tomb of a rich man. Such a wonderful reſemblance of mere conjecture and fact would exceed any prodigy recorded in the ſacred volume.

The ſame obſervation will apply to the predictions of Jeſus Chriſt, whether they relate to his own ſufferings, or thoſe of his devoted country. It is impoſſible that he ſhould have deſcribed them with ſo much preciſion, unleſs his mind had been divinely illuminated. The ſucceſs of modern conjectures is well known: and if Jeſus Chriſt be degraded to the rank of thoſe, who have been moſt expert at gueſſing, I muſt ſay, their talents will admit of no comparison with his. The art, if it was only an art, makes no figure at the preſent age. I muſt therefore conclude, that real predictions were uttered and accompliſhed: and I muſt draw from them the inference, that the ſyſtem, in ſupport of which they have been urged, is divine. I have no other alternative, than either to admit this concluſion, or the moſt extravagant ſuppoſitions that ever diſgraced the human mind.*

* The brevity of the author did not permit him to enlarge on the ſubject of PROPHECY: thoſe predictions, however, reſpecting the fall of ancient cities have been ſo remarkably fulfilled, and afford ſuch unanſwerable evidence of the divinity of the ſcriptures, as to demand the ſerious attention of every impartial inquirer.

The prophet ISAIAH in various places, and particularly in chap. xiii. 19—22. predicts the utter deſtruction of the city of Babylon, in the following remarkable language.

"Babylon ſhall become, ſhe that was the beauty of kingdoms,
"The glory of the pride of the Chaldeans,
"As the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah by the hand of God.
"It ſhall not be inhabited for ever.

"Nor ſhall it be dwelt in from generation to generation:
"Neither ſhall the Arabian pitch his tent there:
"Neither ſhall the ſhepherd make his folds there.
"But there ſhall the wild beaſts of the deſerts lodge;
"And howling monſters ſhall fill their houſes:
"And there ſhall the daughters of the oſtrich dwell;
"And there ſhall the ſatyrs hold their revels:
"And wolves ſhall howl to one another in their palaces;
"And dragons in their voluptuous pavillions."

LOWTH'S TRANSLATION.

BABYLON was indeed the *glory of kingdoms*, and at the height of its glory while the prophet Iſaiah was repeatedly denouncing its utter deſtruction. The city, according to the loweſt account given of it by antient hiſtorians, was a regular ſquare, forty five miles in compaſs, incloſed by a wall two hundred feet high, and fifty broad; in which there were a hundred gates of braſs: its beauty, ſtrength, and grandeur, temples, palaces, and hanging gardens were the wonder of the world.

About two hundred years after the above predictions were uttered, they began to be fulfilled: the city was taken by Cyrus in the preciſe manner predicted. (Iſaiah xliv. xlv.) Ancient hiſtory informs us of its gradual deſtruction by one conqueror after another, till at length it was utterly deſtroyed: and ſo completely is the prediction accompliſhed, that modern travellers inform us, that the place where the city once ſtood is ſo completely occupied with all manner of wild beaſts, and ſerpents, that no one dare approach near it!

The prophet EZEKIEL in the xxvi. xxvii. and xxviii. chapters gives a ſtriking account of the magnificence of TYRE, the extent of her commerce, her princely merchants, her *Slave Trade*, her *boaſted ſovereignty of the Seas*. He predicts her deſtruction in the following words: *Thus ſaith the Lord God; behold I am againſt thee O Tyrus, and will cauſe many nations to come up againſt thee; as the ſea cauſeth his waves to come up: and they ſhall deſtroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers: I will alſo ſcrape her duſt from her, and make her like the top of a rock; it ſhall be a place for the ſpreading of nets in the midſt of the ſea; for I have ſpoken it ſaith the Lord God.*

Such is the prophecy concerning Tyre, comprehending both the city on the continent, and that on the iſland; and it has been punctually fulfilled in regard to both. That on the continent was razed to the ground by Nebuchadnezzar, and that on the iſland by Alexander. The latter uſed all the ſtones, rubbiſh, and earth of the old city in making a cauſeway to join the continent to the iſland, by which means he became maſter of the city, thus *ſcraping her duſt from her*, &c. At preſent, and for ages back, this great city once the emporium of the world, is literally what the prophet foretold. "I viſited" ſays Maundrell, (who wrote his travels about a century ago) "the ruins of Tyre, a mere Ba-"bel of broken walls, pillars, and vaults, without ſo much as one en-"tire houſe: its preſent inhabitants, are only a few poor wretches (har-"bouring themſelves in the vaults, and ſubſiſting chiefly upon fiſhing) "who ſeem to be preſerved in this place by Divine Providence, as a vi-"ſible argument how God has fulfilled his word concerning Tyre, "that it ſhould be *as the top of a rock, a place for fiſhers to dry nets on!*"

The prophecies reſpecting NINEVEH, EGYPT, &c. and their fulfilment are not leſs remarkable. See Biſhop NEWTON'S DISSERTATIONS ON THE PROPHECIES, 2 vols. 8vo. *paſſim*. The evidence for the truth of revelation ariſing from this argument muſt have great weight with every ſerious, impartial inquirer.

SECTION IV.

Evidence ariſing from the character and miracles of Chriſt.

BUT I have a *Fourth* reaſon for my belief and principles as a Chriſtian: and that is, that the author of my religion diſplayed an example, and performed works, which proclaim, not merely a ſuperior, but a divine character. No human language can do juſtice to the temper and morals of Jeſus Chriſt. The excellency of the one, and the purity of the other, render him an object worthy of our higheſt admiration. In how wonderful a manner did he exemplify his own moral leſ-

sons; and how divinely did he support his character as the friend of mankind? With what exquisite tenderness did he conduct himself towards the miserable; and what patience did he display, under every species of provocation? How condescending was he to the weak, how humble, how just, how ready to forgive his enemies; how benevolent to all? What a sublime devotion possessed his heart? In scenes of the deepest distress, how perfect was his resignation? How amiably did he converse? How unblameably did he live? How nobly did he die? And can I reconcile the appearance of such virtue with the mean and interested views of an ambitious impostor? Is it credible, that such pure streams should proceed from a corrupt fountain?

Many, who reject the claims, and deny the miracles of Jesus Christ, admit the moral excellency of his character. A greater inconsistency cannot be conceived! What, is it no offence against the laws of morality to appeal to works never performed; and to pretend to the exercise of powers which never existed? Are deliberate falsehood, imposition, and hypocrisy, to be erased from the catalogue of crimes? Is impiety no stain? And to die with an obstinate and inflexible adherence to false pretensions,—is there nothing immoral in such behaviour? I confess I have very different views of right and wrong. And I feel a strong conviction, that falsehood and deceit, for whatever purpose they may be employed, and to whatever end they may be directed, are to the last degree criminal and disgraceful.

Yet this accusation must be brought against Jesus Christ, if he did no miracles, and was only a self-com-

missoned reformer. He certainly did profess to work miracles; and he did appeal to them as divine attestations to his sacred character. If he insisted that he was sent of God to enlighten and save mankind, he was careful to add, "The works which I do, they bear wit-"ness of me." I must, therefore, deny, that he was that excellent person, which some modern unbelievers profess to esteem him; or, I must admit the reality of those miracles, to which he so often, and with so much solemnity, appealed. There is no other alternative. It cannot be, that he was a splendid pattern of pure and sublime morality; whilst his mission, and supernatural powers, were an artful pretence.

Reduced, then, to the necessity either of admitting, together with the moral excellencies, the miracles of Jesus, or of rejecting both, I can without difficulty make up my judgment. However unphilosophical it may be thought, I am persuaded that he "did such works "as no man could perform unless God were with him." Yes, notwithsanding the metaphysics of some, and the sneers of others, I do believe that he appealed to facts, when he said, "The blind see; the lame walk; the "lepers are cleansed; the deaf hear; and the dead are "raised." God who ordained the laws of nature, can certainly controul or suspend them. Nor is there any thing absurd in the supposition, that occasions may offer on which such an application of Almighty power may be worthy of God, and reflect honour on his wisdom and benevolence.

It is true, such interruptions of the general course of nature are not visible at the present age. Our eyes have never been gratified with the sight of a miracle. But this is no proof, that the eyes of other men in other

ages have imposed upon their understandings. The King of Siam, because he had never seen ice, denied the possibility of its existence. His narrow experience, under a burning sun, was opposed to the testimony of a credible witness. If this prince had been a metaphysician, with what a multiplicity of arguments would he have encountered and overwhelmed the European, who related the effects of cold upon the waters of his country? If he had been a philosopher, how learnedly would he have reasoned upon the elementary particles of fluids; and from their spherical form, how easily would he have demonstrated the impossibility of congelation? But what is logic, when opposed to fact?

The miracles ascribed to Jesus Christ, and the apostles, rest upon the same foundation with other articles which we find in the narratives of his life. They have not come down to us through the channel of tradition; but by means of a formal record, made by persons, who declare themselves witnesses of the scenes which they describe. Nor are they introduced into these records merely by way of ornament; or to animate a dull narration: they are an essential part of the work. In the same page, we find the miracles and moral lessons of Jesus Christ. In the same artless manner, they are both related. For which reason, I feel myself unable to draw the line where truth ends and fiction begins. All my information concerning Jesus Christ, is derived from the same source. Where testimony is so explicit and circumstantial, I must, therefore admit the whole, or reject the whole. I mention this, because some have professed to believe the history of our Lord's discourses, whilst they denied that of his miracles. But these articles are so connected, that there can be no discrimination. If an evangelist deserves credit, when

he solemnly declares the things which he heard; why not when he as solemnly declares the facts which he saw? Why should I ascribe more veracity to his ears, than to his eyes?

That the miracles of Jesus stand as fairly recorded as his moral instructions, is not, however, my only reason for believing them. Certain events, which took place at the memorable period when these miracles are said to have been exhibited, are a demonstration of their reality. I find, that multitudes, who had the best means of informing their minds on this subject, and who could have detected the imposition if any had been practised, were fully persuaded that supernatural power had been exercised by Christ and his apostles. So strong was their conviction, that it overcame early habits; and induced them to embrace the religious system, which appealed to this evidence. Nor was this all: it overcame the apprehensions of contempt, of worldly losses, of every species of injury, and of a cruel and infamous death. Upon the principle of miracles, it is easy to account for this magnanimity. But, if the Christian record of miracles be a mere fable, how came the conviction of their reality to take possession of so many fair and honest minds, and to produce such astonishing effects? Why did *they* believe, who were placed beyond the reach of imposition, and who could have no motive to assent to the powers, claimed by the founder, and first preachers of the religion, but the certainty that they existed? I am free to confess that the faith of multitudes, situated as they were, has great influence in confirming my own.

But, to pursue the argument: I believe the miracles recorded in the New Testament, because they were not

called in question by early infidels. The Jews were compelled to own, that the powers occasionally exercised by Jesus Christ were supernatural. "This man "doeth many miracles," was the confession even of the priests and pharisees: and the modern Jews do not pretend to deny, that the founder of the Christian sect performed many things, which no man could do unless he were assisted by invisible agents: but, to avoid the consequences of such a concession, they both ascribe his miracles to an infernal cause. Succeeding unbelievers were likewise as well convinced of this part of our Lord's history. Julian acknowledges, that Christ opened the eyes of the blind, restored limbs to the lame, and recovered demoniacs from their malady: but he intimates, that these are no very extraordinary feats: and Celsus, another violent enemy to Christianity, not presuming to deny the mighty works of Jesus, endeavours to depreciate them, by pretending that he learned magic in Egypt. Besides, it is well known, that because the miracles of Christ could not be denied, attempts were made to eclipse their glory. Apollonius Tyanæus was brought into public view by two unbelievers, as a person whose powers exceeded those of Jesus. The concessions of Julian and Celsus, and this attempt to set up a rival to the Saviour, may be easily accounted for, if we admit that signs were displayed, and miracles performed by him: but if his supernatural powers were an artful pretence, why did not these adversaries publish the imposition? They did not want sagacity to detect any unfair dealing; and such a discovery would have given the triumph to their cause. That early unbelievers, and some of them persons of the most extensive information; that a Julian and a Celsus did

not deny the miracles of Christ, is with me a very strong argument in favour of those miracles ; and, combined with other evidence, this circumstance is sufficient for my conviction.

Finally : the lying wonders, and pretended miracles of impostors, are a proof that supernatural powers have been employed for religious purposes. This appears to be the just conclusion from these facts. Impostors would not have had recourse to such arts, if they had not known the success of real miracles.

Would counterfeits have found their way into circulation, if there never had been genuine coin ? Did not the latter unquestionably suggest the former ? We may be assured, that pretended miracles would never have enriched the legend of a saint, if real miracles had never attracted the attention of mankind. Supernatural powers have been feigned in latter times, because in the primitive ages such powers really existed: and lying wonders, at the tomb of the Abbè de Paris, came in aid of his doubtful reputation, because the tomb of Christ was the scene of wonders and signs, which gave immortal splendor to his character, and ensured the final triumphs of his cause.

I have now assigned the various reasons, on which I ground my assent to the miracles, which stand recorded in the Christian volume. I believe them, because they rest on the same historic evidence with the moral instructions and common facts contained in that book. I believe them, because contemporary and subsequent events were such as might have been expected, from the operation of miracles on the human mind. I believe them, because the early opposers of Christianity

did not call them in question: and I believe them, because their reality appears to me, to be a fair deduction from many unsuccessful attempts to imitate and to rival them. Thus convinced of the supernatural powers of Jesus Christ and the apostles, I am persuaded that they spake by authority; and consequently, that the religious system, which derives its name from the former, is not only superior to all others, but that it is DIVINE.

SECTION V.

Of the Objections to Christianity.

WITH such force do these arguments operate on my understanding, that I feel an increasing confidence in my principles as a Christian. The more I examine the evidences of my religion, the more am I convinced that it will not be overthrown by the weapons usually employed against it. The foundation which supports it, is not to be weakened by the shafts of wit, or blown down by the breath of ridicule. I am sensible that there is no subject which may not be placed in a ludicrous point of light; as there is no character which may not be vilified. Religion, patriotism, chastity, and almost every moral and social virtue, have in their turn been so exposed as to invite contempt. Soame Jenyns has discharged all his wit upon *the rights of* men, and the leading principles of a free government. If ridicule were the test of truth, his book would be unanswerable: but though it abounds with wit, it contains not one argument; and for this reason, the cause of civil

freedom has suffered no injury from such an assailant. Though republican principles be the butt of his ridicule, yet they command the highest respect, wherever they are seriously examined: and the same observation may be applied to the subject of religion. To overthrow the faith of one, who has studied its evidence, arguments must be employed, and not the false colourings of wit. Facts must be fairly and clearly disproved: otherwise, the Christian will retain his reverence for religion; and though ashamed at the disingenuity of an opposer, he will not be ashamed of the gospel.

But from the wit exerted upon Christianity, I proceed to more sober objections. And I must say, that, however plausible they may seem at first, they do not by any means invalidate its evidence. Many of them are impertinent; because they are leveled, not against the Christian religion, *but against its corruptions:* and many more are sufficiently answered by an appeal to the constitution of nature, and the degree of evidence upon which we act in general concerns. Some objections, if admitted, would overthrow the credit of all history: and others, when pursued to their just consequences, would not only subvert the religion of Christ, but would bury natural religion in its ruins.

In vain, then, are objections of this kind urged against Christianity. In vain am I reminded, that the gospel was first preached to the multitude; and not to the learned and wise. I know that there is as much fairness of mind in the former as in the latter; and in regard to matters of fact, that they are as competent judges. In vain am I called to reflect, that false pretences to inspiration, and lying wonders, have in all ages been employed for political purposes. The fact I do not dispute; but I deny the conclusion. False-

hoods are daily uttered; but does it follow that the truth is never spoken? Because many counterfeits are in circulation, is there no unadulterated coin? As I have before had occasion to observe, the various arts of religious imposition take their origin from real miracles and a real inspiration. In vain am I told that the Christian system is not universal, and of consequence cannot proceed from the common parent of mankind. I know that reason is imparted in various degrees; that the means of improvement, civil liberty, and all the outward blessings of life, are bestowed in different measures on different objects; and yet I am persuaded that they all come from God. In vain is my attention called to the angry disputes of Christians, respecting the doctrines of the gospel. I am convinced, that such is the weakness of the human mind, disputes may arise on any subject. I hear men dispute on the principles of government, the rights of citizens, and the nature and extent of civil liberty: and yet I doubt not that these rights, and this liberty, have a real foundation; and that the end of government is their security. Why, then, should the disputes of Christians discredit the gospel? In vain is my faith insulted with the mortifying insinuation, that professors do not exemplify the virtues of their religion; that their principles and practice are often at variance. I am sensible that Christians are rational agents; and that the influence of their religion is not compulsory, but moral. Why, then, should I be more surprised that the laws of the gospel should be occasionally disregarded, than that the dictates of conscience, or the laws written on the heart, should not always maintain their authority? In vain will any urge, to the prejudice of Christianity, the ambition of a priesthood; and the various steps by which the ministers of religion ascended from the condition of instructors, to that of oppressors. The gospel, I am certain, gives no

countenanee to sueh abuses. So far from it, spiritual pride,and spiritual tyranny,are objeets of its exeeration. I might go on to enumerate other popular objections against the system; but he who has formed his ideas of Christianity from the writings of the apostles and evangelists,will be eertain that its eredit is not injured by them.

As there is not any subjeet whieh may not be turned into ridicule,neither is there any historieal fact,against which many plausible objeetions may not be raised. Considering his power, influence, and popularity, the destruction of Cæsar, by the Roman senators, may be opposed with great ingenuity; and many arguments may be brought to fix a suspicion on this part of antient history. The execution of Charles the first,and the triumphs of Cromwell, are likewise artieles whieh a logician might assail with many objections: and if a seeptic were so disposed, how easily might he refute (as the term is sometimes understood) the American history of independence? He might eontrast the naval and military strength, the riches and the population of Britain, with the poverty and weakness of the colonies: he might also expatiate on the different principles, habits, interfering interests,and jealousies of the eolonists; and subjoining the fears of some, and the strong attachment of others to their politieal parent, he might, from the whole, show the incredibility of our revolution. Still,the glorious fact is a refutation of sueh reasonings; and I must observe, that in regard to historical relations, the testimony of one eredible witness will outweigh millions of sueh objections as a fruitful imagination may easily invent.

This convietion never fails to accompany me, when I repair to the saered oracles. In the New Testament I find a detail of instruetions given, of wonders perfor-

med, and of futurities revealed. I am also struck with a particular account of the sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Other astonishing events are likewise as circumstantially related: and the history containing these things appears to be as fairly written, and to carry with it as substantial proofs of its authenticity, as any history which has gained credit in the world. Do any ask, why I believe the antiquity of the Christian records? I answer, for the same reason that I believe the antiquity of Virgil's poems, Cæsar's commentaries, or Sallust's narrations; and that is, the concurring testimony of all intervening ages. Do any ask, why I believe that the several books were written by the persons whose names they bear? I answer, for the same reason that I believe the Georgics to be the production of Virgil; Jerusalem Delivered, that of Tasso; Paradise Lost, that of Milton; an Essay upon the Subject of Miracles, to be the work of Hume; and a Refutation of that Essay, the performance of Campbell. Do any enquire, whether the sacred pages have not been greatly corrupted? I answer, they have not been greatly corrupted; as appears by a collation of the earliest manuscripts, and an appeal to the earliest versions and ancient fathers. So many corroborating circumstances plead in favour of the gospel, that I must either distrust all records, or continue to admit the authenticity of those which display the duty and hopes of a Christian.

To conclude: the religion of Jesus Christ does not decline a fair examination. It consents to meet opposition; but in the character of its opponent it requires certain qualifications which have not always appeared in the contest. It requires a large acquaintance with the system itself; an acquaintance formed, not *through the medium of human creeds*, but by a direct application

to the evangelic records. And it requires an extensive knowledge of the peculiar language in which those records were originally composed, of the various readings grounded on different manuscripts, of Heathen and Jewish testimonies, the customs and moral state of those countries where Christianity was first published, of the concessions and objections of the earliest unbelievers, and of the general history of the church. Thus furnished, several have attacked this religion ; but the contest has generally terminated in their conviction. I know many instances where men have opened the history of Christ with the disrespect of unbelievers, and closed it with the reverence of Christians.

The prevailing sentiments of Americans will be naturally on the side of that religion which has been the subject of this work. Its influence in the first settlement of the country, will not be soon effaced from their minds. Their political principles will inspire a reverence for a system which admits of no respect of persons ; but enjoins the same duties on all ; and opens to all the same prospects of glory, honour, and immortality. Its benevolent tendency, conspiring with its evidence, must ensure to it a fair examination. And those who thus examine, even if they remain unconvinced, will consent that others should cultivate its temper, and follow its rules. They will not be displeased at seeing the virtue of their neighbours directed and invigorated by Christian principles: and though they may not see fit to adopt their language, yet they will impute no uncommon weakness, credulity, or fanaticism to those who say with the Apostle, "LORD TO WHOM SHALL "WE GO? THOU HAST THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE."

FINIS.

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